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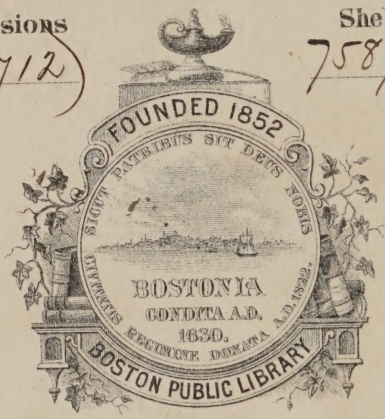

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"The New Commandment."

REMARKS

OCCASIONED BY REV. O. B. FROTHINGHAM'S

"DISCOURSE

DELIVERED

IN THE NORTH CHURCH, SALEM,

ON SUNDAY, JUNE 4, 1854."

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REMARKS.

If such a discourse had been preached a quarter of a century since, or even within a less period, by a professedly christian minister in this region, it would, of course, have been supposed that an infidel had obtruded himself into the pulpit, under the guise of a christian teacher; or that his opinions had undergone a very material change, subsequent to his settlement. There can be nothing found in the writings of Hume and Gibbon more sneering, and denunciatory on the christian church, and on Christianity as it has been held and practised by some of the most eminently devout men, than is contained in these pages. But unhappily the community has become too familiar with such *religious* discourses, to be much surprised at its character. Mr. F. seems to belong to a class of clergymen who have such transcendental views of religion, and such a

presumptuous conceit of their own superiority to the wise and good of this and every other age, that they repudiate every form of Christianity but their own, as destitute of true virtue, and pour contempt on a great portion of the Bible itself, as unchristian and partaking, in a large measure, of the rude and savage spirit of the periods in which it was written. No doubt they think themselves far in advance of the views and spirit of the great founder of our religion himself, and if they did not stand too much in awe of public sentiment, which, with all their airs of independency, they dare not encounter beyond a certain point, would impute even to Christ many of the erroneous ideas of the nation among whom he originated.

That the estimate formed of the character of this discourse is not exaggerated, we submit, is sufficiently proved by the following extracts.

"Christians themselves, in their capacity as Christians, instead of making this love of Christ the test of discipleship, have thrown that into the background, and brought forward another, which would be more easily accepted." p. 7.

Again: "Believe, believe, clamor the churches, *and you need not trouble yourselves with the casting out of the demons that possess you.*" p. 7.

"Men consider that their belief—their opinions well or ill founded—their notions, crude, blind, prejudiced though they may be, will ensure for them the blessing of Christ,—however atrocious

be the deeds they do, however unloving the dispositions they entertain." p. 8.

"All know that in every existing denomination, not excepting the most liberal, a creed is the test of discipleship." p. 9.

"Must we not then confess that credence is put for love, that belief is made the test of discipleship, and that *Christians by the very best evidence of conduct, declare* that they may safely be guilty of malice, hatred and uncharitableness, provided they are sound in philosophy?" p. 9.

"Persons are not admitted to the communion, save in a very few churches, however pure and self-sacrificing of heart, if they have a reasonable doubt upon any point of the creed; and how rarely does it happen, that any are forbidden the communion by reason of a base and ignoble life." p. 10.

"How strange a commentary does christian history furnish upon the idea of Christ. How plainly does it appear that Christians may be *guilty of any atrocity, if they only hold fast the faith*, and that the purest life can save none who have incurred the slightest taint of heresy." p. 11.

The reader will observe in what sweeping terms these heavy charges are made. They apply to the whole body of the christian church. Their universality is qualified by the slightest exceptions. If the language which the author uses, is an accurate expression of his opinions, he be-

lieves that there has never been Christianity enough in the world to make it necessary for him to modify, but in the smallest degree, the language in which its non-existence is denied. Those who have professed to receive Christianity are not merely charged with mistake and insincerity, but they are accused of practising and tolerating any form of wickedness, and sanctifying the abomination by a supposed correct belief. We suppose he intends to except, of course, that sect of purists, and extra-brand Christians to which he belongs, and of which Theodore Parker is the representative and head in this community; and yet the charges are comprehensive enough to include them also in their relentless proscription.

If Christians, and Christianity as it has existed, are what this *christian* preacher has represented them, they have been as great nuisances as the earth ever contained. The church—Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Liberal—has been a curse to human society, and should long ago have been expelled from the world. What a mystery of Providence that these holy reformers had not lived earlier, that they might have purified that temple of abominations—the christian church—and scourged out those hypocritical intruders, who, by the "demons" that they have suffered to "possess them"—the "unloving" dispositions which they have entertained—the "atro-

cious deeds" which they have done and countenanced, and the "base and ignoble lives" which they have lived and approved, have made Christianity an instrument of debasement, and its temples of worship as bad as dens of thieves! One would suppose that after these severe vituperations of the christian church, Mr. F. would not claim for it any beneficent influence on the world, and that he would impute to it nothing but mischief and disaster. And yet one of the most marvellous things about the discourse is, that he has prefixed to it a "prefatory note," in which he has the condescension and charity to speak of the "inestimable benefit and blessing that Christianity has been to the world;" and "the practical good which the church in all ages has done." After heaping the most wicked abuse upon Christians of every sect and name, he has the effrontery to appeal to the candor of the persons whom he has calumniated. He needs it enough, most certainly. But how could he expect to find candor in such vile characters as he has represented Christians to be? Candor, however, would not serve his turn, if the "atrocious" and "base" persons of whom he asks it were capable of exercising the grace. Candor, in its highest possible degree, would be obliged to leave his imputations the name of the most gross and inexcusable calumny. His gracious admission of the 'good which the church has done,' "and the

virtues and private graces of its members," will not exempt him from the charge of being a traducer. We suppose, of course, that he does not mean to retract, in the preface, the slander which he uttered in the sermon. If the fear of the scrutiny and indignation to which the publication of the discourse would expose him, led him to a more careful examination of his accusations, and induced, in any measure, the apprehension that he had been guilty of over-statement, he should either not have consented to the request of "the standing committee," or have consented only on the condition of a permission to make the necessary changes in phraseology. It is pretty evident that he means to retract nothing; and that the object of the preface is to save himself some of that severe censure which he had good reason to apprehend, and to show how devoutly he could believe both sides of a contradiction. If there ever was a preface which contradicted a discourse to which it was introductory, this is one. And if the author has not discrimination enough to perceive it, then it must be acknowledged that some candor should be exercised towards him, as one possessing such a peculiar structure of mind, as to divest him, to some extent, of accountability for his conduct.

On page 14th, the author adduces as one proof of his charges of defect of the spirit of love in professed Christians, that "the most liberal body

of believers in our own community has excluded from the company of disciples one whose faithful, humane and spotless life, would honor any christian fraternity, because he differs from them in opinion on some points of historical criticism and speculative theology."

Suppose it were so, (although we do not admit that any injustice has ever been done to Mr. Parker,) what has the author himself done? He has charged not only one man, but the whole body of believers, in every age, with a destitution of the most essential element of Christianity. He says that "Christians," not some Christians, not *professed* Christians in distinction from others, but "Christians," without any restriction or modification, "care more for dogmas than they do for charity," and are ready to quarrel and persecute and hate one another, and to utterly eradicate the spirit of their Master in their zeal to make valid a distinction, or to establish a quibble. "Dogmas!" "Charity!" The history of intolerance and dogmatism furnishes nothing more dogmatic and uncharitable than this. If Christians are ready to *hate* one another, and to *utterly eradicate the spirit of their Master* in their zeal to establish a quibble, they have nothing of Christianity left to entitle them to the name. This sweeping and enormous accusation denounces the whole body of the christian church, and would shut out of the pale of discipleship thousands, who are quite as faithful

and humane and spotless in their lives, as he conceives Theodore Parker to be. And yet this is the man who arrogates to himself and his party, the almost exclusive possession of the christian spirit, and thinks himself peculiarly commissioned to expound the new commandment, and preach charity and love to his fellow men. It is very much like a slaveholder preaching on the equality of human rights, and uttering the most severe invectives against the American people for their total disregard of the principles of republican liberty.

The discourse was occasioned, as it seems, by the recent delivery of the fugitive slave to his master in Boston, and the author comments, in the usual style of his party, on the flagrancy of the act. In the course of his remarks he makes a declaration as remarkable as any thing in the discourse. "If," says he on page 18, "but one in a thousand of those nominal and professing Christians in Boston had been a *real* Christian, that shame, that hideous outrage never could have been perpetrated." The reader will observe here another precious exemplification of the author's charity. He does not admit that even a thousandth part of the professed Christians in Boston are what they assume to be. The population of that city is 140,000, so that Boston contains but one hundred and forty Christians; and this calculation is made on the supposition that he con-

siders the whole population as making this profession. As however he would not include infants, who of course could exert no influence in obstructing the execution of the fugitive slave law, a fifth part must be deducted for that class of the people. Subtracting then 28,000 from 140,000, and dividing the remainder by 1,000 there remain one hundred and twelve. One hundred and twelve are all, and even more than all the Christians to be found in the city of Boston, on the largest estimation. But the number will be still smaller, if we restrict the terms "nominal and professing Christians" to those who are communicants in the churches, or to those who make any pretensions to be governed by christian principle. We are willing however to take the terms in their broadest signification. Does the charitable author then really think, that there are but one hundred and twelve Christians in Boston? Why, this is but a small proportion of those who attend on Theodore Parker's ministry, and accept of his teachings. Does he mean to exclude nearly the whole of Mr. Parker's admirers from the limits of his charity?

But then the absurdity of supposing that one hundred and twelve individuals could have been influential enough to prevent the rendition of the fugitive! In what way were they to exercise such a mighty power? The author shall answer in his own words: "Without a blow struck, with-

out a hand lifted, the power of the Government would have fallen down and expired, unable to breathe in that atmosphere of humane feeling." The humane breath of a hundred individuals then would have withered all the energies of the United States Government, so that its power would have fallen down and expired in the streets. Without the use of a single weapon, without the application of a hand or a finger to the officers of the Government, the latter would have found themselves suddenly paralysed, as by the touch of a torpedo.

> "They astonished—all resistance lost—
> All courage; down their idle weapons drop."

As to these potent few, it might have been said:—

> "One spirit in them ruled, and every eye
> Glared lightning, and shot forth pernicious fire
> Among the accursed, that withered all their strength,
> And of their wonted vigor left them drained,
> Exhausted, spiritless, afflicted, fallen!"

Now if it be in the power of one hundred neighboring individuals to achieve such wonders as this, a most heavy responsibility rests on the shoulders of the abolitionists. They have fallen immensely short of their capabilities. If one hundred could not have been found in Boston to have effected the liberation of the slave, could not enough have been called from the vicinity, to have rounded the number? Where was Mr. Frothing-

ham, and his "standing committee?" Why did not they march forth to reinforce the Spartan band of Boston? It was only for the "sacramental host of the elect," which could easily have been called in the vicinity of the Court House in the metropolis, to have taken their stand before its walls, and by one mighty expiration to breathe out an atmosphere of purity and humanity on the tainted air of that region, and "the policemen would have resigned their trusts; the military would have disbanded rather than serve in such a cause; no wharf, no ship, no carriage or conveyance of any kind would have been furnished for the unholy work." Why then were not these "real" Christians at their posts? And why have not the chains long ago fallen from the limbs of every slave in the union? If a hundred could have disbanded two thousand armed men, and caused all the police to resign their trusts, and laid an embargo on every ship and other vehicle that should be designed to be employed in the return of the fugitive to Virginia, and that without lifting a hand or striking a blow, then what miracles of philanthropy might not the abolitionists accomplish! Mr. Frothingham and his "standing committee" might purify the whole atmosphere of Salem, and convert every man to obedience to the new commandment, in a day. It is only for the "spotless" and humane Theodore to become the centurion of the little Boston band, reinforced by

Mr. F. and the "standing committee," and march forth with their contribution of "brains" without "bullets" into the slaveholding states, though at the fearful hazard of leaving the city destitute of as many righteous as would have saved Sodom from destruction, and wherever they presented their saintly array, they would diffuse around them such a hot atmosphere of purity, that the iron manacles of the slave and the more iron hearts of the masters would melt before them, like wax before the fire.

But how does it appear that if "real" Christians had existed in Boston in sufficient numbers, the United States Government would have failed of executing its laws? There are not a few in the country who claim to be real Christians, and who have this character accorded to them by a large part of the community, who, believing the law to be demanded by the Constitution, are in favor of its existence and execution. They may not be Christians according to Mr. Frothingham's definition of the term; but they do not admit his qualifications and authority to decide, so dogmatically as he has done, on the true construction of the designation. Professor Stuart of Andover—a gentleman who, to say the least, was as capable of deciding on the elements of a christian character as Mr. F., and we think by no means his inferior in conscientiousness and benevolence—wrote a treatise in vindication of the fugitive slave law.

Will he say that Professor Stuart was not a Christian? Dr. Dewey—a distinguished minister of the Unitarian faith—has expressed his decided approval of the compromise of 1850. Are we to understand that the author excludes him from the pale of Christianity? Even Dr. Channing, with all the strong testimony which he has borne against the slaveholding system, in his treatise on the duties of the Free States, does not object to the surrender of the fugitive slave, so long as the Constitution requires it. He was of opinion that the law of 1793 should be altered. These are his words—"A trial by jury ought to be granted to the suspected fugitive, as being the most effectual provision for innocence known to the laws. It is said that under such a process, the slave will not be restored to his master. Undoubtedly the jury is an imperfect tribunal, and may often fail of a wise and just administration of the law." Again he says—"A trial by jury should be granted, unless some other process as safe and effectual can be devised." Here it is plainly implied that a law should exist providing for the delivery of the fugitive, but that the rights of the claimed person should be protected by the safeguard of a jury. It is also implied, that if such a jury should refuse a verdict in favor of the claimant—his claim being sustained by proper evidence—they would fail of a wise and just administration of the law. Now we understand Mr. Frothingham as object-

ing to the surrender, under any circumstances, *with* a jury or *without*, as a most unchristian act, and an act in which no real Christian would participate. So that it is Frothingham vs. Channing, on the question whether Dr. Channing was a Christian.

Now we submit to Mr. Frothingham and the "standing committee" of the North Church, whether Dr. Channing's claims to a christian character will not stand as high with posterity as those of the minister of said church; that is, provided the name of the latter ever reaches the ears of posterity. We would ask what, upon the whole, is the maturest judgment they are prepared to pronounce on the question?

Further—a gentleman whose name is somewhat known and honored in the United States, and which name is George Washington—when President of the Union, put his signature to the law of 1793, which required the surrender of the fugitive slave, under provisions in some respects less favorable to human rights than the law of 1850. Does the author intend to imply that Washington was not a Christian? Does he mean to say that he countenanced "a hideous outrage"—that he put his official signature to an "infamous statute?" If there is guilt at all in the matter, Washington is as fully implicated as any that were concerned in the restoration of Burns. They were employed in the rendition

only of one fugitive. Washington concurred in making a law which was intended to operate on the whole country, and which was instrumental in sending back into slavery every individual who was actually surrendered from 1793 to 1850.

It is quite certain that if Boston had contained as many as one hundred and twelve Christians, which number is greater than even he who has so fully imbibed the spirit of the new commandment can allow it, all like Washington, "that shame and hideous outrage" *would* have been perpetrated; because he intended to authorize and require the commission of such an outrage, whenever a fugitive could be found by his master. Although the application of Mr. Frothingham's principles would certainly rank the Father of his country among those pretended Christians, whose claims he superciliously repudiates, we are obliged to think that they will not much affect the great man's reputation, and that the great body of those whose opinions are entitled to regard, of every age of the civilized world, will continue to place him among the most illustrious of the men of patriotism and virtue, and the vindicators of human rights, notwithstanding he signed a fugitive slave law, and probably would not have shrunk from its execution, if he had been called to act, more than President Pierce and the Mayor of Boston.

The author, on page 18th, supposes the questions to be asked—"What could we have done in a case like this, [i. e. the rendition of Burns,] last week? What could Jesus himself have done, had he been there?" And the answer is—"I cannot tell. It is enough that where there is a will, there is a way."

Now if the Savior had been in Boston on that occasion, associated with about a hundred disciples, we are plainly told, in the sermon, what could have been done. The little band would only have been required to stand still, and breathe out an "atmosphere of humane feeling," and the whole machinery of government, court, and police, would have come to an instantaneous stop; and Burns would have walked forth from the custody of the officers, liberated, and "disenthralled by the genius of universal emancipation!"

But suppose the Savior had been there *alone*, or with only the few righteous that he could summon to his aid in that modern Sodom—what then! They would not have been able to produce an atmosphere of humanity extensive and intense enough to accomplish the benevolent work. This has been demonstrated by facts. The fugitive *was* delivered to his master, because the atmosphere of the metropolis was not sufficiently impregnated with benevolence to unnerve the arm of the law. And the deficiency was owing, according to an authority which Mr. F. will not dispute, to

the fact that not a thousandth part of the population of the City had become christianized enough to disinfect the corrupted air.

There would be no alternative, then, for the Savior but violent resistance to the civil authority. Does Mr. F. suppose that he would have adopted the alternative, and that he would have engaged in a contest with the United States Government? Did he ever rebel against the civil government, and engage in conflict with officers employed in the execution of the law? Did he ever hint at such a proceeding, or give the least countenance to such acts on the part of his followers?

And if the supposition could for a moment be admitted, that with a hundred, or less, individuals, Jesus would have attempted resistance, on that occasion, to two thousand armed men, the result could not be doubted, unless miraculous power were exerted. We do not know whether the author concedes the possession of such power to the Savior. We believe that Theodore Parker, and his school, to which we suspect Mr. F. strongly inclines, deny its exercise altogether.

But even if he admits it, yet, as scenes quite as flagrant and cruel as Mr. F. considers the recent rendition to be, were continually passing before the eyes of Jesus while upon earth, in which he did not see fit to interfere by the exercise of supernatural agency, there is no just reason for supposing that, had he been present at

this time, he would have acted so contrary to the whole course of his life.

But we shall still be told that "where there is a will there is a way," and that if the City of Boston had only contained enough of such saints as we suppose the author claims himself and the "standing committee" to be, the disgraceful scene would not have occurred. The mere presence of a few pious individuals would have paralysed every arm that was lifted against the enlargement of the slave. A virtue would have gone out of them which would have scattered the agents of tyranny, like chaff before the whirlwind. But alas! the city could not furnish them.

It is truly wonderful to observe how exclusive some persons have become, who have hitherto, if they do not now, ranked themselves among the liberal class of Christians. The orthodox Christians have been subjected to pretty free censure, for admitting the claim of so few to be ranked among true believers. The Unitarians have thought themselves greatly injured by the illiberality of those who differ with them in regard to their favorite opinions. But lo! there issues one from their own ranks, who comes very near proscribing all the professed Christians who ever lived. He is the most exclusive of all exclusives. If a person does not coincide with him precisely, in regard to the nature and extent of a certain great evil—if he does not rigidly conform to his-

own ideas of the best mode of attempting to remove that evil—if he does not put his feet down where the leader takes his feet up, the door is shut in his face without ceremony. There is nothing in all the imputed narrowness of the orthodox, that compares with such dictation and intolerance.

Well, it illustrates what has often been said, that there are no greater dogmatists than some who preach the loudest against dogmatism; there are no more intolerant men than some who are perpetually crying out against intolerance; and there are no more uncharitable, censorious persons, than many who boast the loudest of their liberality, and denounce all uncharitableness. The new commandment is even newer than Mr. Frothingham claims it to be. It is yet to be learnt by him who pretends to exercise most of its spirit, and yield it the most perfect obedience.

We should like to know whether the sentiments of the Society, generally, to which Mr. Frothingham ministers, accord with the views presented in this sermon. We have been accustomed to think more highly of the intelligence and sobriety of feeling that prevail there, than to suppose that such monstrous extravagance and illiberality could be received with much favor by most of its members. We hope, however faithfully the "standing committee" may execute the will of the society in other respects, that so far as the act of approv-

ing and publishing this discourse is concerned, they are not in "good standing."

We conclude by recommending to Mr. Frothingham a careful revision of his religious opinions; a more faithful scrutiny into the state of his own heart; a better exemplification of the new commandment which he recommends to others; and that when he is requested by the "Standing Committee" to publish another of his discourses on a subject like this, he do not trust their judgment, unless they are a very different committee from the present, but that he submit both the sermon, and whatever "prefatory note" second and inconsistent ideas shall suggest, to the opinion of some intelligent and really christian friend, not of the Boston one hundred and twelve, who either by dissuading him from publication, or by a careful process of revision and expunging, may save him from the discredit of undertaking to edify the public by the exhibition of indigested views and a most illiberal temper.

NOTE.

Since the preceding remarks were written, it has been perceived that there may have been an error committed in regard to the proper extent of the import of the terms "those nominal and professing Christians in Boston." Perhaps the author intended to restrict them, either to members of churches, including the attendants upon the anniversaries from places without the city, or to members of Christian Societies, non-communicants as well as others, actually in Boston during the "Holy Week," as it is termed. This would be saying that not one thousandth part of those who were in the city at that time—who were interested in the religious celebrations, and who claimed to be supporters of what are acknowledged to be most benevolent and useful Associations, could lay any claim to the possession of a really christian character. It is rather probable that the author intended to confine the expressions to those who are members of churches, distinctively so called, and in either case he would exclude "the persons who engage in the effort to abolish the institution of slavery," and who, he says, "for the most part" are "unconnected with the church."

This does not give us any more favorable view of the author's liberality.

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